



Whitman to Jeannette Gilder: Unpublished

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ON THE BACK COVER:

WHITMAN TO JEANNETTE GILDER: UNPUBLISHED—Hitherto unpublished, this letter—now in the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress, and printed with Mr. Feinberg's permission—to Jeannette L. Gilder (1849–1916), editor of *The Critic*, to which Whitman contributed two dozen pieces between 1881 and 1890, has to do with the second of six articles entitled “How I Get Around at 60, and Take Notes,” in *The Critic* in 1881 and 1882. Most of the pieces were rewritten and revised for *Specimen Days* (see Floyd Stovall's edition of *Prose Works 1892* [New York: New York University Press, 1963], 1:346–351). No. 2 appeared on 9 April 1881, the day Whitman wrote the letter. As for Victor Hugo, Whitman did not write about him in this issue of *The Critic* but he mentions him several times in other letters and a dozen times in *Prose Works 1892*, the longest entry (2:759) reprinted from the *New York Daily Graphic*, Christmas Number 1874: “Victor Hugo, for instance, runs off into the craziest, and sometimes (in his novels) most ridiculous and flatulent, literary blotches and excesses, and by almost entire want of prudence allows them to stand. In his poems, his fire and fine instincts carry the day, even against such faults; and his plays, though sensational, are best of all. But his novels, evidently well meant, in the interest of Democracy, and with a certain grandeur of plots, are frightful and tedious violations of the principle alluded to.” Hugo's “L'Année Terrible” is referred to in the *Other Journals* section of *Walt Whitman's Diary in Canada* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1904), pp. 52–53. And in the *Daybooks* [New York: New York University Press, 1978], 1:70, is this entry for 6 November 1877: “Miss Selons there—her talk about Victor Hugo & his family, doings, conduct &c. at Guernsey—his treatment of his wife, daughter, & sister-in-law.” The final *Daybook* entry (2:358) for 4 June 1885 reads simply: “burial of Victor Hugo.” Whitman was in Boston from 13 to 19 April, and gave his “Death of Lincoln” lecture on 15 April 1881 (see Gay Wilson Allen, *The Solitary Singer* [New York: New York University Press, 1955], pp. 491–492). William Douglas O'Connor (1832–1899), author of *The Good Gray Poet* (1865), Whitman's greatest champion, apparently never wrote anything for *The Critic*, even if Jeannette Gilder ever asked him to.

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